

CLASS 5 - PARSHAS ACHAERI MOS - KEDOSHIM

by Rabbi Heshy Grossman

"And you shall be holy" - "Perushim - separating yourselves [from worldly pleasures]" (Sifra)

"And the reason for this verse: [You shall be holy] for I am holy, Hashem, your Lord. Telling us that we will merit to cleave to Him, when we become holy." (Ramban)

This Mitzva is mandate to do without luxuries, abstaining from actions that are legally permissible but morally reprehensible.

The Torah commands that we build a fence to surround prohibitions, distancing ourselves from any hint of sin. This is more than a protective measure to insure that we don't stumble. Rather, we are trying to create the proper attitude towards evil, to engender a disdain for anything that relates to the subject of sin.

In Orthodox Jewish life today, thousands of people are meticulously observant of the finest details of Halacha, loathe to accept easy leniencies. Yet, though Shabbos is kept until the later Zman of Rabbeinu Tam, and fortunes are spent on the finest Esrogim, we do not see signs of a resurgent holiness.

If it is this action, more than any other, that brings us closer to G-d, why is there no indication of this in our circles?

Think about this: Why does the Torah not refer to one who refrains from cheating or stealing as a Kadosh?

Apparently, it is not mere adherence to Chumra or abstinence from sin that is cause for Kedusha, but the restricting of physical desire that merits a special holiness, an ability to relate to the Creator.

1

"Because of its significance, [this Parsha] is said in the gathering of all Israel (B'Hakhel), for it contains all the Ten Commandments, and remnants and branches of all the Mitzvos are mentioned in this Parsha." (Tzror HaMor)

Our Sages enumerate the verses in this week's Parsha that parallel each of the Aseres HaDibros. Much as the Ten Commandments incorporates all the Torah, so too, the general injunction to be Kadosh encapsules all of G-d's will.

Not only do the tablets allude to other Mitzvos, but Sinai established a framework for all subsequent commands. In the same way, Kedushah is the basis for all ritual observance, defining the guideline and general goal of Mitzvos, to infuse our lives with holiness, sanctifying our physical world.

For this reason, we prepare for each Mitzva with a blessing: 'Asher Kideshanu B'Mitzvosav'; every command is designed to bring the holiness of G-d down to His people.

Kedushah then, is something that exists beyond the individual. On a deeper level, every Jew shares a personal connection with the nation as a whole, relating to the group as more than the sum of its parts. It is here that association with G-d becomes tangible, having separated ourselves from the selfish egocentrism that is the barrier to true spirituality.

'Kedoshim Tihiyu' is a command that relates to every individual, but from a national perspective. For this reason, it is said, 'B'Hakhel', in the presence of all Israel. As Kedusha is the basis and framework of every Mitzva, it is the nation of Israel that provides a spiritual basis for the life of each Jew.

2

"The one who is separate, pursues his physical desires" (Mishlei 18,1)

Why do so many modern marriages end in failure? If we live in an age of love and tolerance, how is it that so many people hate their friends and family?

The basis for most relationships today is self-gratification. 'I would like to go out with you' translates as: 'it will make me happy.' Each individual's primary concern is their own needs and desires. Hence, by definition, most relationships are doomed to failure. The moment their present situation changes and their spouse no longer meets their needs: 'Good-bye, I don't love you anymore.'

Physical desires separate one man from another, each one focused on his personal fulfillment. The man of Kedushah pays no heed to the cravings of his body, sacrificing his materialistic self in pursuit of a more lasting goal. He feels a kinship with all those who long for truth and unifies the B'nai Yisrael in their realization of Heaven's plan.

It should now be clear why our generation's enhanced observances have not led to a heightened level of Kedushah.

We would never let our Mitzvos stand in the way of enjoying the good life.

Of course, we are all very Makpid that our meat be Glatt Kosher, in accord with the ruling of the Bais Yosef. And when we eat out on Sunday at the new Thai restaurant, and Monday do Chinese, we make sure that our Czechuan chicken has only Chassidishe shechita. And separate seating of course, for a truly Heimishe atmosphere.

Who would eat meat during the Nine Days? True, we have extended a bit the primary mourning period, but "Don't worry", ran a popular advertisement, "this year you can look forward to the Nine

Days, your favorite restaurant will be serving a vegetarian menu!"

The command of Kedoshim is designed to combat precisely this: Our observances should separate us from the nations, helping us stand apart. If Mitzvos are viewed as obstacles, destined to be overcome by modern technology, we are doomed to bask in self-indulgence, wrapped up in ourselves, but divorced from our Creator.

3

"And you shall be holy, to Me, for I am holy, Hashem, and I will separate you from the nations, to be Mine" - "If you are separate from them, you are mine, and if not, you are Nebuchadnezzar's and his friends" (Rashi, VaYikra 20, 26)

Kedusha - or harsh exile, this is our choice, the two ends of the pendulum.

Attachment to the physical world separates us from our true home, we become estranged from both land and nation.

Even more, we are forced to endure the brunt of Divine wrath, and we suffer at the hands our enemies.

What is the purpose of G-dly punishment?

G-d is our shepherd, leading His flock to an eternal destination. Every once in a while the sheep go astray. The shepherd assures that the herd stays in line, gently nudging the wandering few.

If they fail to respond, oblivious to subtle requests, he hits a little harder, until the flock submits, restored to its ultimate aim.

While our desires are many, G-d's will is one.

When man begins to see the whole picture, punishment achieves its goal.

G-d has no need for retribution, He metes out judgment only as required. Like any good patient, the righteous man understands that pain does not stand on its own, but is part of the extended healing process.

This is the goal of Kedoshim.

While the hedonistic man of desire is conscious only of the need of the moment, the man of Kedusha recognizes the body's true value; as a vehicle in service of a higher goal. He recognizes this Kedusha as the purpose of all the Mitzvos combined, and it is this unified vision of life that saves him from the harsh hand of Nebuchadnezzar and friends, the punishment due to those who stray.

He is consistently loyal to the one goal that his life personifies, that sets his nation apart:

".....Kedoshim Tihyu Ki Kadosh Ani Hashem Elokeichem"

JerusalemViews, Copyright (c) 1999 by Rabbi Heshy Grossman and Project Genesis, Inc.